

Gowri and Ganesh

We usher in idols of both Gowri and Ganesh during the Ganesh festival. Gowri is enshrined for 3 days and Ganesha usually for 10 days. There are several interesting stories about Gowri and Ganesh in the Shiv Purana. We can learn a lot from each story...

Shani's Krura Drishti

Parvati is extremely happy to see the perfect features of Ganesha, her womb born son. She invites all the gods to seek their blessings. All the gods are eager to see Shiva Shakti's son.

Shani, Surya's son, however, lingers in the background with his eyes downcast. Parvati notices this and says, "Come forward, Shani. Will you not look at my son?" Shani says, "He has my most special blessings Ma. I do not wish to harm him in any way. So I look away from him. Let it be that way." Parvati laughs at him and says, "He is the son of Shiva and Shakti. No harm can ever come to him. Here, do have a look at him!" Saying this, Parvati thrusts her boy under Shani's eyes.

The boy's head gets burnt to a cinder the very next instant. Parvati is inconsolable. Shani feels deeply guilty but there is nothing he can do about it. Vishnu ponders briefly, flies off on Garuda and finds an elephant whose head is facing north. He cuts off the head of the elephant and places it on the headless body of Parvati's son. The boy is restored to life much to the delight of Shiva and Parvati and the immense relief of Shani.

Gajapathy

Shiva and Uma once wander off deep into the jungle. They find two elephants nestling with each other. Shiva and Uma too assume the form of a black and a white elephant. The child born out of this union of Shiva and Uma is an elephant and is known as Gajapathy.

Vi-nayaka - the child born without the male seed

One day Jaya and Vijaya, the two friends of Gowri say, "Gowri, the Ganas and Nandi do a good job of guarding your doors. But they are loyal to

Shiva and obey him first. Then you.” Gowri just smiles and decides to take a leisurely bath with them. She asks Nandi to stand guard outside her bathing quarters and looks forward to spending some time with her friends.

But Shiva yearns to meet Gowri just then. On an impulse, he decides to visit her. Nandi does his duty and conveys Gowri’s message to Shiva. But Shiva gives him a cold look and storms right into Gowri’s chambers.

Jaya and Vijaya rush out of their bath waters seeing Shiva’s unannounced entry. Gowri is irked by Shiva’s behaviour and asks him to come back after she has finished having her bath. Shiva does not realize that he has done something wrong and agrees to return after a while.

When Gowri returns to her bath, she finds the turmeric that she had applied on her body floating on the bathwater. She scoops up a handful of it and breathes life into it. A handsome lad is born in a flash.

Gowri is immensely pleased to see her son Vinayaka. She gives him a staff made out of flames and asks him to stand guard outside her doors. She gives him explicit instructions saying that no one should be allowed to enter her quarters until she has finished having her bath. Shiva is unaware of all this. When he returns after a while he finds a mere lad standing guard outside his wife’s chambers. He decides to put his arrogant obstinate wife in place and attempts to breeze past the lad. In vain.

A fierce battle ensues. All the gods are awestruck by this battle. Vishnu and Brahma too arrive to witness the battle. Vishnu looks at Shiva and says, “This lad is born out of Gowri’s Shakti. You can kill him only on the sly.” Shiva asks Vishnu to help him. So Vishnu whirls the Sudarshan Chakra at Vinayaka to distract him while Shiva goes behind him and lops off his head.

The Ganas start dancing in jubilation. But the gods are horrified by this sudden turn of events. They can sense the danger that is in store for them. When Jaya and Vijaya inform Gowri of her son’s gory death, she storms out of her bath waters stark naked. She is grief-stricken to see her

son's decapitated body and starts howling with rage as she transforms into BhadraKaali.

Shiva realizes his folly much too late. BhadraKaali releases all her Shaktis and asks them to devour all the Devas, Ganas and her husband too. She is hell-bent on bringing an end to all the worlds and there is no stopping her....

Shiva too trembles when he sees Gowri releasing her primordial Shaktis. The Maharishis are the only ones who can appease BhadraKaali's righteous anger. They look at her large red dilated pupils and her tongue hanging out. She is in her element with all her 10 arms wielding a different weapon. The Maharishis are unfazed by her anger.

They close their eyes, pray to her and start reciting chants in her name. They appeal to the mother in her and through their verses say, "Ma - you are the mother of the entire cosmos. The cosmos cannot sustain itself without your Shakti. Such violence will put an end to everything within the cosmos. Look at Shiva. Look at Vishnu. Look at Brahma. They are all appealing to you with their heads bent. Please call back all your Shaktis..."

Shakti, BhadraKaali closes her eyes. There is darkness everywhere. She then slowly opens them again and says, "I will recall my Shaktis only if my son has life." Shiva immediately sends out his Ganas and asks them to fetch the body of the first being that faces north. They return with the head of an elephant, place it on the headless body of Vinayaka and bring him back to life.

BhadraKaali is overjoyed to see her son alive again. She blesses him with all the Siddhis and touches his forehead with her sacred hand - removing all his distresses forever. She looks at him with love and says, "You have seen only strife and blood since you were born. So men will worship you with vermillion. But from now on you shall know only peace and contentment. And you will be worshipped before all the other gods!"

BhadraKaali then recalls all her Shaktis and assumes the docile form of Gowri again. Shiva looks at his wife with relief, places a hand on the lad's

head, accepts him as his son and makes him the leader of all his Ganas. So Vinayaka is also known as Ganapati.

Vinayaka then asks for forgiveness from Vishnu and Brahma and says, "Forgive me for my crimes. Let arrogance never go to our heads again!" All the Devas shower their blessings on Shiva, Uma and Vinayaka. They are happy that peace is finally restored in all the worlds.

Gowri Habba

Gowri Habba is celebrated for with great fervour for three days during the Ganesh festival in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. In North India, it is celebrated a day before Ganesh Chaturthi and is known as Hartalika. It may be celebrated differently in different parts of India. But the essence is the same everywhere. Gowri and Ganesh are with us. Always. Shakti empowers us. Ganesh removes the obstacles from our path. Worry lines no longer crease our brows. Fear no longer lurks in our hearts. Faith prevails. Above all else.